United Nations A/C.5/53/SR.6

General Assembly
Fifty-third session

Official Records

Distr.: General
2 December 1998
English
Original: French

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 6th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 12 October 1998, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

Contents

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 116: Administrative and budgetary coordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency

Agenda item 113: Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999 (*continued*)

Analysis of savings resulting from the improved overall cost-effectiveness achieved pursuant to the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, including the restructuring of the intergovernmental machinery and the reform of the Secretariat, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997 and proposals pursuant to General Assembly decision 52/462 of 31 March 1998

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 114: Programme planning

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98-81555 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 116: Administrative and budgetary coordination of the United Nations with the specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency

First report: activities of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly (A/53/7)

1. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) introduced the Advisory Committee's report summarizing its activities during the fifty-second session of the General Assembly (A/53/7). The reports prepared by the Advisory Committee were set out in the annex to document A/53/70. A substantial amount of the Advisory Committee's work related to the funds and programmes of the United Nations. A brief summary of reports submitted to the legislative organs of United Nations funds and programmes was provided for the information of the Fifth Committee.

2. Over the reporting period the Advisory Committee had held meetings in New York, The Hague, Geneva and Vienna. Extensive discussions had been held with representatives of the specialized agencies and with programme managers; the subjects covered included currency exchange rates, reform and restructuring programmes and the application of accounting standards. The information gathered by the Advisory Committee would be very valuable in its future work. For example, the Advisory Committee had concluded from its survey of the application of accounting standards that there was an urgent need for a review of some of the articles of the United Nations system accounting standards (A/51/523).

3. On reform and restructuring, there was a need for close cooperation between the United Nations and the specialized agencies. Member States were paying millions of dollars for the development of new technology systems. Such expenditure could be reduced if agencies were to cooperate and learn from one another.

4. There was an extensive programme of reform relating to planning, programming and budgeting. However, it was the Advisory Committee's impression that too often not enough discussion had taken place either in the secretariats or at the intergovernmental level to forge a clear consensus on what should be reformed and how reform should take place. Often reform measures had been forced on organizations by financial crisis. In such a situation mistakes were made, entailing further expenditure to correct them.

5. He trusted that the Advisory Committee's report would give the Fifth Committee useful information on the activities of ACABQ. The Advisory Committee intended to follow up on a number of issues that had emerged from the discussions held with the specialized agencies and the United Nations. Accordingly, a number of reports would be issued at the current session.

6. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) expressed satisfaction at the quality of the report of ACABQ, which would greatly facilitate the Fifth Committee's work. He wished to make a number of observations. Budget constraints were not without impact on the quality of programme execution and some deficiencies remained in the implementation of results-based budgeting. The Advisory Committee had noted, however, in paragraph 47 of its report, that the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) had cut its administrative expenses by 30 per cent during the previous five years while maintaining staffing levels constant. That was an example that should be followed.

7. He expressed regret at the gap between the programme of work of the Centre for International Crime Prevention and the level of resources allocated for its implementation. Too many projects had been implemented or were being considered without being analysed carefully and performance and client satisfaction measurement systems had been introduced in Vienna before there had been a proper discussion with the Secretariat (paras. 57 and 53 of the report). He intended to comment further on various other paragraphs of the Advisory Committee's report during informal consultations.

8. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) thanked the Chairman of the Advisory Committee for his excellent report. On the subject of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) (para. 21), he noted that the Inspectors had emphasized the importance of close cooperation between the Committee as well as the desirability for the Committee to comment regularly on reports of the Unit. He noted in that connection that the most recent report of JIU had been submitted to ACABQ and to the General Assembly in mid-August 1997 and that the Assembly's comments thereon were contained in document A/52/685, but that the Advisory Committee had not yet commented on the report. Since the Advisory Committee was expected to give top priority to its consideration of the report of JIU, he wondered when it proposed to do so.

9. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), replying to the

representative of Japan, said that the Advisory Committee attached to the report of JIU all the importance which it merited. He noted, moreover, that many of the recommendations which had been made by the Unit had already been implemented. The Advisory Committee had intended in principle to consider the report of JIU the following week, but had just received reports which had significant budget implications and which must therefore be accorded priority. The report of JIU would be taken up immediately after that.

10. **The Chairman** proposed that the Fifth Committee should recommend that the General Assembly take note of the Advisory Committee's report and request the Secretary-General to bring the report to the attention of the heads of the secretariats of the specialized agencies and funds and programmes concerned.

11. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 113: Programme budget for the biennium 1998–1999 (*continued*)

Analysis of savings resulting from the improved overall cost-effectiveness achieved pursuant to the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, including the restructuring of the intergovernmental machinery and the reform of the Secretariat, as requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997 and proposals pursuant to General Assembly decision 52/462 of 31 March 1998

Draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.6

12. **Ms. Brennen-Haylock** (Bahamas), Vice-Chairman, introducing the draft resolution contained in document A/C.5/53/L.6, said that "decision 42/462" in the second preambular paragraph should be replaced by "decision 52/462" and that the correct title of the document cited in operative paragraph 2 (b) was to be verified by the Secretariat. She wished to draw particular attention to the amount indicated in operative paragraph 1 (5,526,600 United States dollars) and to operative paragraphs 6, in which the Assembly regretted the lack of clear information concerning the savings achieved, and 8, in which the Assembly decided to continue consideration of the question. Consensus had been reached on the draft text during the informal consultations.

13. **The Chairman** said that if he heard no objections he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt draft resolution A/C.5/53/L.6.

14. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 112: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

General debate

Draft decision A/C.5/53/L.7

15. **Ms. Brennen-Haylock** (Bahamas), Vice-Chairman, introducing the draft decision contained in document A/C.5/53/L.7, said that the text had been unanimously approved during the informal consultations.

16. **The Chairman** said that if he heard no objections he would take it that the Committee wished to adopt draft decision A/C.5/53/L.7.

17. *It was so decided.*

Agenda item 114: Programme planning (A/53/6 (Prog.1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13/Rev.1, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 23 and Corr.1, 24 and Corr.1, 26, 27 and 28), A/53/16, A/53/90, A/53/122 and Add.1, A/53/133 and A/53/134)

18. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller), introducing the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001 (A/53/6), said that the proposed revisions concerned 17 programmes and that all of them followed certain general lines. The replacement, for example, of former programmes 5, 7 and 8 by programme 28 was as a result of the creation of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. A new programme, programme 27, entitled "General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and conference services", had been included following the establishment by the General Assembly of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. Those two examples showed that the proposed revisions took account of the administrative structure of the Secretariat and sought to ensure that each programme corresponded to a specific department or office so that responsibilities could be clearly identified. A common element in the proposals concerning the activities of the regional economic commissions (programmes 14, 15, 17 and 18) was that they all sought to incorporate a gender-specific perspective in all policies and programmes of the United Nations system, in accordance with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women.

19. Introducing next the proposed revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (A/53/133), he said that the proposed revisions took account of the experience gained and previous practices as well as of the provisions of General Assembly resolution 48/218 B. For reasons of efficiency, the current regulations, comments and proposed revisions were set out in three different columns in the document.

20. Turning to the report of the Secretary-General on priority-setting within the medium-term plan (A/53/134), he drew attention to Regulations 4.2, 4.7 and 4.17 of the Regulations Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (paras. 7 and 4 of the report), whose purpose was to establish the priorities at the subprogramme level. However, while in the previous plan structure, all the subprogrammes within a programme were governed by one functional or sectoral body, under the new plan structure, subprogrammes within a programme related, in many instances, to more than one body. Consequently, the designation of priority among subprogrammes within a programme could not be achieved in the absence of overall direction from a single body. Moreover, in its resolution 41/213, the General Assembly had requested the Secretary-General to submit an outline of the programme budget that contained an indication of priorities, reflecting general trends of a broad sectoral nature. The question to be addressed therefore was what was the difference in the setting of priorities in the medium-term plan and the setting of priorities in the outline, not to mention the risk of redundancy. That issue did not arise in the context of the current biennium, as the Assembly had established identical priorities in both cases. The Assembly might nevertheless wish in the future to consider the setting of overall priority in only one instance.

21. **Mr. Asadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran), introducing the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the work of its thirty-eighth session (A/53/16) in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee, first welcomed the constructive approach which the Committee had adopted towards its work and the total commitment of members and observers towards the strengthening of the Committee's role.

22. The Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the proposed programme budget outline for the biennium 2000–2001 (A/53/220) using as a framework the four elements listed in paragraph 1 of the report. It had taken note of the report and had recommended that the General Assembly give further consideration to all the aspects contained in the outline, taking into account the views of Member States and the elements listed in paragraph 28, of part two of the Committee's report.

23. The Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on programme performance of the United Nations for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/53/122 and Add.1) and had commended the efforts made to improve the quality of the report and to review programme performance within the context of the medium-term plan for the period 1992–1997. It had concluded that in future performance reports, more emphasis should be placed on qualitative analysis to reflect achievements in implementing programme activities. The Committee had recognized the need for effective systems at the intergovernmental and departmental levels to ensure that the activities corresponded to the mandates reflected in the medium-term plan and programme budgets, as well as the need to monitor and evaluate the quality of performance. In that regard, it had recommended to the General Assembly that the Secretary-General be requested to submit proposals for consideration by the Committee at its thirty-ninth session on ways in which full implementation as well as the quality of mandated programmes and activities could be ensured and could be better assessed by and reported to Member States. The Committee had also concurred with the report's findings regarding the need for more effective coordination as a means of reducing overlap and duplication of programme activities. In view of that, the Committee had recommended that coordination of the work of the Organization be undertaken when the programmes were formulated.

24. With regard to the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan for the period 1998–2001, the Committee had recommended in Chapter II, section B of part one of its report that the Economic and Social Council and the competent Main Committees of the General Assembly should stress in particular the consideration of the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan that had not been submitted to the attention of sectoral and regional bodies (programmes 1, 3, 13, 18, 20, 24, 26 and 28). The Committee had also considered the report of the Secretary-General on priority-setting within the medium-term plan (A/53/134) and had recommended that priorities should continue to be established in the medium-term plan and that, once established by the General Assembly, they could not be altered unless the Assembly decided otherwise.

25. The Committee had recommended approval of the proposed revisions to programmes 1, 2, 3, 20, 23, 24, 26 and 27, as well as to programmes 14 to 18, subject to certain modifications. With regard to programme 14, Economic and

social development in Africa, the Committee had decided to request the Secretary-General to update programme 6, Africa New Agenda for Development, and had recommended approval of the proposed revisions to programme 6, subject to the modifications outlined in paragraph 38 of part two of its report. Subject to the modifications indicated in paragraph 49 of part two of its report, the Committee had recommended approval of the proposed revisions to programme 13, International drug control, based on the revised report which the Secretary-General had submitted at the second part of its session reflecting the outcome of the twentieth special session of the General Assembly devoted to the question of drugs. With regard to programme 28, Economic and social affairs, the Committee had recommended that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly should consider possible arrangements for the establishment of a programme and/or subprogramme in the medium-term plan on post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction as well as on the transition from relief to development. The Committee had recommended the deletion of programmes 5, 7 and 8, which had been consolidated in the new programme 28.

26. The Committee had recommended approval of the new programme narratives for section 7 A, Economic and social affairs, and section 26, Public information, subject to a number of modifications. It had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the new narrative (E/AC.51/1998/6) and had welcomed the use of defined targets for the implementation of mandates, programmes and activities. It had recommended that the Secretary-General be requested to improve the preparation of future programme budgets by better formulation of objectives, in accordance with the medium-term plan and indicators of achievement and the level of resources required for full implementation of mandated programmes and activities.

27. On the subject of evaluation, the Committee had considered the note by the Secretary-General on strengthening the role of evaluation findings in programme design, delivery and policy directives (A/53/90). It had stressed the importance of further improving and integrating evaluation into the cycle of programme planning, budgeting and monitoring and had recommended that the General Assembly approve the addition of two programmes to the schedule of in-depth evaluations, namely, policy coordination and sustainable development and population; reports on those evaluations were to be submitted to the Committee at its forty-first session. The Committee had made a number of recommendations on the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP). It had emphasized that the realignment of the Centre for International Crime Prevention with UNDCP should result in better coordination between those entities and should produce important synergies, while safeguarding the multidisciplinary aspects of drug control policy. With regard to the United Nations Environment Programme, the Committee was of the view that UNEP should fully implement the recommendations contained in the in-depth evaluation (E/AC.51/1995/3) and had recommended to the General Assembly that the triennial review of the implementation of the recommendations (E/AC.51/1998/5) should be forwarded to the Governing Council of UNEP for its consideration.

28. Turning to coordination questions, he said that the Committee had considered the annual overview report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) and had requested that future reports should be more analytical and highlight problems encountered. The Committee had reiterated that ACC should focus on the strategic objectives established in the Charter of the United Nations, the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and the medium-term plans of the organizations of the system. The Committee had recommended that ways should be found to analyse and bring to its attention, through the annual overview report of ACC, the results of the work of the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions on issues dealt with by the Committee within its mandate. It was the Committee's view that there was a need for ACC to organize frequent briefings for various intergovernmental bodies with a view to increasing interaction between ACC and Member States. The Committee had endorsed the recommendations contained in the progress report on the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women 1996–2001 (E/CN.6/1998/3, para. 52) and had recommended that the Economic and Social Council should approve them. In recalling Economic and Social Council agreed conclusion 1997/2, it had recommended that all entities should designate focal points to facilitate the implementation of the system-wide plan and the mainstreaming of a gender perspective. The Committee had agreed to consider the draft system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 2002–2005, to be prepared by the Secretary-General in his capacity as Chairman of ACC, in the year 2000. The Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the United Nations System-Wide Special Initiative for the Implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s, which evaluated the results achieved in

implementing the Special Initiative and addressed a number of recommendations to the Secretariat in that regard.

29. The Committee had considered the report of the Secretary-General on proposed revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation (A/53/133). It had recommended that the General Assembly should approve those revisions subject to a number of amendments and requested the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to prepare revisions to the relevant rules and to bring them to its attention before promulgation. Lastly, the Committee had considered the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" and the comments thereon by the Secretary-General. The Committee had stressed the importance of publications in printed form. In conclusion, he said that, within the context of reform, the role of CPC as the main subsidiary organ of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council for planning, programming and coordination should be highlighted and that its conclusions and recommendations should be followed up.

30. **Mr. Schlesinger** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the Central and Eastern European countries associated with the European Union, the associated country Cyprus and the EFTA country member of the EEA Iceland, said that the European Union had always stressed the importance of the various phases of the cycle, including planning, programming, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, and of the close linkages that they must have to each other. In that connection, the medium-term plan was the principal policy directive of the United Nations, and the European Union had indicated at the time of the plan's adoption that it supported the priority spheres of activity.

31. According to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme, Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and Methods of Execution, the medium-term plan should be revised as necessary every two years. Mindful that, in the past, proposed revisions to the medium-term plan had prompted lengthy discussions which had already led to an impasse in the General Assembly, the European Union welcomed the ability of CPC to agree on all proposed revisions to the medium-term plan. Such success was attributable to its new working methods. The European Union was prepared to endorse the recommendations regarding programme planning as contained in document A/53/16.

32. The European Union was pleased with the new format of the medium-term plan which, in establishing closer linkages between planning and budgeting, enhanced accountability and responsibility within the Secretariat. Nonetheless, it was regrettable that the reports of the Secretary-General on programme performance were largely descriptive in nature. At the departmental level, only large-scale field operations included an evaluation function. Thus, the information contained in the evaluation reports was not sufficiently detailed to be of use in the next stages of the planning and budgeting cycle. The European Union agreed with the Committee that there was a need to find a way to improve monitoring, evaluating and reporting with regard to programme performance, and to place greater emphasis on the qualitative analysis of achievements in order to enable Member States not only to evaluate whether the objectives of a programme had been attained but also to engage in systematic reflection on the main programmes of the Organization.

33. **Mr. Gjesdal** (Norway) said that, for years, Norway had made every effort to strengthen the role of oversight at the United Nations. Programme monitoring, evaluation and self-evaluation, which were elements of the broader oversight function, made it possible to evaluate achievements and to determine whether the best practices were being followed. They also provided a basis for prioritizing activities, reassessing old mandates and undertaking reform.

34. His delegation believed that the in-depth evaluations undertaken by the Office of Internal Oversight Services generated an adequate number of recommendations in the areas chosen by CPC, but that they were not implemented as they should be. Moreover, decentralized evaluation activities should take place on a more regular basis. His delegation welcomed the monitoring and evaluation guidelines, which had been jointly elaborated by the Office of Internal Oversight Services and the Department of Management, which set out minimum monitoring and evaluation standards that should be in place in each department and office. His delegation noted, in the note by the Secretary-General on strengthening the role of evaluation findings (A/53/90), that the institutional arrangements in place varied and that some programmes were virtually not evaluated at all, while the large-scale field operations (such as those administered by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) had well-established evaluation functions. His delegation wished to receive, at some future point, information on the extent to which the new guidelines were being implemented.

35. His delegation recognized that not all programmes could be evaluated in the same way, that quantitative criteria alone were not sufficient and that the success or failure of a particular programme could not be judged solely in the context of the Organization. Therefore, the evaluation framework had to be flexible and allow for a diversity of approaches. In that regard, the common service programmes, on which only efficiency reviews, albeit very useful, had been conducted to date, should be evaluated.

36. Moreover, Governments should be involved in the evaluation process as users, clients and beneficiaries, and should encourage better follow-up in programme design, delivery and policy directives of the evaluation findings. They should also encourage the use of evaluation as a tool for the improvement of management.

37. With respect to the proposed revisions to the medium-term plan, his delegation welcomed the spirit of agreement that had prevailed in CPC. It strongly supported the Organization's emphasis on development activities, especially those aimed at sustainable development, poverty eradication, education and health. It supported the priority assigned to Africa and endorsed the views of CPC on the need for further coordination of the efforts of African countries and the support of the international community in the implementation of the New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s.

38. **Mr. Theophylactou** (Cyprus) noted that, under section 7B (Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development) of the report of the Secretary-General on programme performance by section of the programme budget for the biennium 1996–1997 (A/53/122/Add.1), the implementation rate of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s needed to be increased. In his report on priority-setting within the medium-term plan (A/53/134), the Secretary-General had justifiably included the development of Africa among the top priorities. That question should therefore benefit from the allocation of appropriate resources. Implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative for Africa must be expedited, and it was to be hoped that the proposed revisions to programme 14 of the medium-term plan (Economic and social development in Africa) would bear fruit. His delegation, which was aware of the importance of development programmes in other regions of the world, welcomed the auspicious beginning of the new Department of Economic and Social Affairs and trusted that it would continue to provide developing countries with support within the framework of technical cooperation.

39. His delegation welcomed the fact that, although the Department of Public Information used the latest technologies, in particular the Internet, to disseminate quality information to a wide audience, it did not ignore the traditional means of communication. Such means of communication should continue to be used, and the United Nations information centres should continue to receive support since there was a technological gap between the least developed areas of the world, especially Africa, and other countries. The commendable efforts to take advantage of the possibilities of the Internet, especially because of its cost-effectiveness, should not, however, compromise the quality and timeliness of documentation.

40. **Mr. Sklar** (United States of America) said that his delegation attached great importance to planning, priority-setting, performance monitoring and programme evaluation in the day-to-day work of the Organization. During its thirty-eighth session, CPC had held fruitful discussions on those issues and had not hesitated to review its own working methods. His delegation supported the recommendations of CPC in that regard and hoped that the Fifth Committee would follow the example of CPC at the current session of the General Assembly. His delegation also fully supported the recommendations of CPC on programme planning and urged the Fifth Committee to endorse them. In particular, it wished to draw the Committee's attention to several recommendations.

41. In paragraphs 33 and 34 of its report, CPC concluded that in future performance reports, more emphasis should be placed on qualitative analysis to reflect achievements in implementing programme activities and recommended that the Secretary-General should be requested to submit proposals on better ways to assess programme implementation. On the same subject, his delegation supported the termination of 57 outputs carried over to the biennium 1998–1999, since it believed that they were outputs of marginal value whose elimination would not adversely affect the priority work of the Organization (para. 38 of the report).

42. The Committee had made some important observations on the need for improved programme evaluation. With respect to the new narrative for sections 7A and 26 contained in paragraphs 179 and 180, it had recommended that the Secretary-General should improve the preparation of future programme budgets by better formulation of objectives and indicators of achievement. CPC had clearly intended that the recommendations should be applied across all sections of the budget.

43. In paragraph 219, the Committee had stressed the necessity of further improving and integrating evaluation into the cycle of programme planning, budgeting and monitoring with a view to improving and strengthening programme formulation and implementation. In the same vein, the Committee had recommended some key revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation, which would require the Secretary-General to include expected achievements in his budget proposals and to monitor and evaluate accomplishments.

The meeting rose at 11.30 a.m.